



Media Fairness Initiative

A Look at Bias in the News



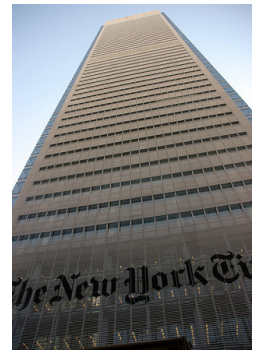
NYT Public Editor Criticizes McCain Story 2/26/08

The *New York Times* has faced widespread criticism for its front page story last week alleging an improper relationship between Sen. John McCain and a female lobbyist.

The *New York Times*' own public editor, Clark Hoyt, criticized the story in his Sunday column:

"The article was notable for what it did not say: It did not say what convinced the advisers that there was a romance. It did not make clear what McCain was admitting when he acknowledged behaving inappropriately — an affair or just an association with a lobbyist that could look bad. And it did not say whether Weaver, the only on-the-record source, believed there was a romance. The *Times* did not offer independent proof ..."

"A newspaper cannot begin a story about the all-but-certain Republican presidential nominee with the suggestion of an extramarital affair with an attractive lobbyist 31 years his junior and expect readers to focus on anything other than what most of them did. And if a newspaper is going to suggest an improper sexual affair, whether editors think that is the central point or not, **it owes readers more proof than the *Times* was able to provide.**"



NY Times Practices Double Standard

The *Washington Post*'s Howard Kurtz contrasted the *Times*' handling of the McCain story with its handling of previous alleged scandals:

"When Gennifer Flowers held a news conference in 1992 to announce that she had carried on an affair with Bill Clinton, **the *New York Times* devoted one paragraph of a news story to her charges.** 'I am ashamed for my profession,' Max Frankel, then the paper's editor, said afterward. 'We don't want to report on the candidates' sex lives.'"

The *Times* decided to run the McCain story on the front page, above the fold, with no such regrets about reporting on alleged affairs. In addition, the *Times*' coverage of McCain's categorical denial of any wrongdoing was relegated to page 20 of the next day's edition.

National Media Criticize NYT

In his "Media Notes" column on Monday, The *Washington Post*'s Howard Kurtz described the criticism the *Times* story has faced: "But with McCain and Iseman both denying an inappropriate relationship, a rough consensus is emerging among journalists that the *Times* story was **fatally flawed** ..."

"That's the problem with journalists making unconfirmed charges about an affair alleged to have taken place nearly a decade earlier. The larger point, if there is one, gets lost."

The Media Research Center's Brent Baker described the network news coverage of the *Times* story: "All three broadcast network evening newscasts led Thursday night with the *New York Times* story alleging an improper relationship by John McCain with a female lobbyist, **but questions about the journalistic standards of the newspaper were given as much consideration as the allegations against McCain.** All three ran a soundbite from Rush Limbaugh denouncing the paper while ABC and CBS featured establishment media observers who castigated the *Times* for basing a story on the feelings of unnamed sources ..."